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RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
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SIPDIS

SENSITIVE
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STATE FOR AF/S GABRIELLE MALLORY
STATE FOR INR/AA

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: PGOV KDEM KCOR MI
SUBJECT: MUTHARIKA HAILS "AFRICAN HERO" MUGABE

REF: LILONGWE 365

¶1. (SBU) Summary: Zimbabwean President Robert Mugabe ended
his four day state visit to Malawi on May 6, after opening a
road named in his honor and publicly condemning the West.
Malawian President Bingu wa Mutharika played the part of
amiable host, asking donors to resume support to Zimbabwe and
calling Mugabe a "true democrat" and an "African hero." For
his part, Mugabe called those Malawians who opposed his
visit, "blacks speaking for their white masters."
Referencing the travel sanctions placed on him, Mugabe stated
at the public opening of the Robert Mugabe Highway that he
is, "not a Briton and does not desire to live in Europe." End
Summary.

¶2. (SBU) Mutharika went to great pains to ensure that
Mugabe's visit went smoothly, despite the objections of some
civil society organizations (reftel). Mutharika had
previously convinced a number of NGOs to go along quietly
with the Mugabe visit by promising them that he would set up
an audience for them with Mugabe, to discuss human rights
violations in Zimbabwe. Despite civil society disappointment
and anger when this meeting, predictably, failed to take
place, there were no large scale protests while Mugabe was in
the country.

¶3. (SBU) The GOM made numerous efforts to welcome Mugabe,
prominently placing his picture alongside that of Mutharika
at round-abouts in the capital. Mugabe was feted with a full
honor guard upon arrival and departure, presentation of the
freedom of the city of Lilongwe, a state dinner, and a large
formal ceremony to open the highway, near Blantyre. All the
events received prominent coverage in the state-run media.
There was a heavy and visible police presence in Lilongwe
throughout the visit.

¶4. Mutharika took every available opportunity to publicly
sing Mugabe's praises. Departing from his prepared remarks
at the state dinner, Mutharika called Mugabe "a true democrat
in every sense of the word" because he had unified Zimbabwe's
two liberation forces. Mutharika extolled Zimbabwe as a
great investment opportunity, telling Mugabe, "I believe the
economy will soon bounce back because of some of the economic
policies your government has put in place." Mutharika has a
number of connections to Zimbabwe, including a large farm
there and his Zimbabwean wife, which have led to his close
relationship to Mugabe.   Although rumors abounded that
Mutharika's Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) was set to
sign an agreement with Mugabe's ZANU-PF during the visit,

according to government sources nothing came of it.

¶5. (SBU) Comment: From the government's perspective, Mugabe's visit went relatively smoothly, in large part due to Mutharika's effectiveness in quieting civil society, who had loudly questioned the rationale of honoring a human rights abuser. While Mutharika has clearly shown that he has no fear of cozying up to an international pariah such as Mugabe, the visit itself will not likely do lasting damage to Malawi's international standing. The real harm to Malawi's reputation will come from Mutharika's own actions. The arbitrary arrest and detention of a dozen opposition leaders apparently in connection with this visit, along with a continuing pattern of intimidation of political opponents by actual and threatened prosecutions, is of serious concern to all those who wish for a healthier democracy in Malawi. Mugabe,s visit provided an opportunity for a great many Malawians to ponder whether Mutharika is beginning to adopt Mugabe,s Zimbabwe example on human rights.
EASTHAM